Integrated Marketing Campaign Case Study: Dove Real Beauty

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Introduction

What defines beauty? This is the question that started a long-run journey of the well-known Real Beauty campaign by Unilever brand, Dove. Originally starting as a creative strategic research effort, brought to life the concept and heart behind the Real Beauty campaign. In 2004, Dove partnered with Ogilvy and Mather, a top advertising agency, to develop a global research study and brief on the truth and perception behind real beauty. As the portrayal of female beauty grew in popular media, there was clear concern for the image representing something unauthentic and unattainable. “Dove’s mission, in commissioning The Real Truth About Beauty study, was to explore empirically what beauty means to women today and why that is. Further, Dove wanted the study to assess whether it was possible to talk and think about female beauty in ways that were more authentic, satisfying and empowering” (Etcoff, Orbach, Scott, & D’Agostino, 2004).

The main findings from this study found that only about 4% of women consider themselves as beautiful and feel confident in their own skin. From this starting point, Dove knew that they had to be a part of changing this statistic, and so the Real Beauty campaign was born. The importance of studying this integrated marketing campaign is due to the proof and evidence that one brand can start a cultural conversation and position themselves as more than just a product factory, but instead become a part of a relationship with the consumer. Analyzing the SWOT analysis of Dove in 2004, during the launch of this campaign, demonstrates the impact of a brand standing up for a cause greater than just their products or services, alongside an understanding of the strategy and tactics that truly made the campaign successful. Even to this day, Dove is still running strong with the extended version of the Real Beauty campaign.
Executive Summary

The Dove Beauty brand makes a statement by themselves, as their name alone most likely brings a soap product or simple bird logo to mind. They stand out as a personal care and beauty company both in conversations and in-store. Being around for over 60 years, Dove pursues top of mind brand positioning compared to many others within the same industry. When the brand was first started by the Lever Brothers, they were only producing basic beauty soap bars, however, since then they have expanded to a variety of products including “body wash, deodorant, dry spray antiperspirant, shampoo, conditioner and styling aids” (“Dove”, 2020).

Today, Dove has become a top brand across the world, and they promote themselves as the “home of real beauty” (“Welcome to Dove…”, 2020). Dove has not only created a top body care brand but has stepped into the role of an advocate and empowerment for women, even before the movement in our culture started. Their most recent vision statement gives the heart of their brand through stating “we believe beauty should be a source of confidence, and not anxiety. That’s why we are here to help women everywhere develop a positive relationship with the way they look, helping them raise their self-esteem and realize their full potential” (“Our vision”, 2020).

Throughout the years, Dove has always directed their advertisements to hold a stronger presence among their female target, and emphasized the concept of pampering, keeping their marketing fun, light, and flirty. However, as their brand presence continued and as media expanded into the beauty department, Dove soon realized they needed to step into the negative sway toward the ideal image of beauty for women. This change in marketing direction has facilitated the positioning that Dove now holds, as they currently run various campaigns and
initiatives that promote the average woman. “Dove is rooted in listening to women” (“Dove”, 2020).

In 2010, Dove launched their first line of products designed specifically for men and have even directed recent campaigns towards fathers with the heart of making them feel stronger and more confident in their role as a dad. With their constant innovation and shift toward the trends of technology and culture, Dove has been able to stay competitive and relevant among other recognizable names including Olay, Nivea, and Johnson & Johnson (Bhason, 2019).

**Situation**

As Dove attempted to enter the market in this new way, there were many challenges that the brand needed to anticipate as well as utilizing the strengths and opportunities that they knew were in their favor. A SWOT analysis gives the necessary insight into the target consumer, market positioning, and industry, prior to introducing a new concept or campaign. In 2002 right before the creation and launch of the Real Beauty campaign, Dove also performed a market analysis to properly assess both the internal and external environments, in order to ensure market penetration and a successful campaign.

Looking into the strengths of Dove at this time, there were many factors that gave this company such a platform to deliver from. Dove possessed a wide market with quality products. Even almost 20 years ago, Dove had obtained a plethora of products that gave them a top position within the market to be profitable from almost any consumer advertising angle. “Dove was tapped to become a Masterbrand in February 2000. In that role, it was called on to lend its name to Unilever entries in personal care categories beyond the beauty bar category, such as deodorants, hair care products, facial cleansers, body lotions, and hair styling products” (Deighton, 2007, p. 2). The advertising of these products held a strong presence in functional
benefits, however, Unilever realized that Dove was in such a position to take a point of view in popular media and culture and cater that towards their marketing efforts. Another strength came from the research behind this point of view but realizing the emotional appeal and emotive promotion that could come from a self-image campaign. “Dove have been tapping into current issues of self-confidence and body image ideals that are prevalent in today’s Western society… their research has given them real insight into their market and they have created emotional advertising that has got us all talking” (Holliday, 2014, pp. 10). The unique selling point of promoting a certain stance on such a hot button topic in culture challenges the brand to step up on both the ways that they are selling their products and presenting their brand. The ultimate question, will it stand the test of media?

While the strengths of the internal market are clear, there are also weaknesses to be aware of. Taking a stance on real beauty can have many unique benefits that set Dove apart from the rest of the competitors in the market, but there is also a danger and weakness that can come with it. “When you talk of real beauty, do you lose the aspirational element? Are consumers going to be inspired by a brand that doesn’t promise to take you to a new level of attractiveness? Debunking the beauty myth brings with it the danger that you are debunking the whole reason to spend a little more money for the product” (Deighton, 2007, p. 4). Dove already had such a strong representation within the beauty and body care market that the brand had to consider the risk of choosing such a strong opinion. Along with this decision, there is a weakness in the lack of product advertising. Presenting a campaign that does not lead to the product or service but instead directs the female-based target toward social change and activism, that could even come against beauty and body care brands, creates a difficult challenge that Dove may not have foreseen before launching their radical campaign. A research study on the post-effects on the
Real Beauty campaign explains this by stating that “becoming a ‘real beauty’ who self-brands her neoliberal identity ideologically and materially in the name of empowerment. This “social change” denies agency regarding beauty” (Murray, 2012, p. 83).

Moving into the external factors of the business and creative analysis, there are various opportunities that Dove found in the market during the launch of the Real Beauty campaign. Marketers should have a strong sense of spotting opportunities seen within the potential positioning for a brand, and “a company may benefit from converging industry trends and introduce hybrid products or services new to the market” (Kotler & Keller, 2016, p. 49). In this same way, Dove saw the emerging trends of media and took advantage of marketing on YouTube and other social platforms before brands even started to use social media marketing. While Dove was not introducing a new product or service, they were introducing a social stand against the beauty industry in a way that made their own beauty brand stand out and be set apart from the rest of their competition. Another opportunity that can be found within the market for Dove advertising is the gear and direction toward men. While the Real Beauty campaign highlights women, it opened the door for a conversation about the way that beauty and attractiveness is advertised and presented for men, allowing Dove to later create a product line specifically for the male gender (Belch & Belch, 2018).

Exploring the possible threats that Dove both faced and could have faced gives much insight into the development and research of future campaigns for similar brands and positions. In an effort to redefine beauty, there are multiple risk factors and threats that can take away from the heart behind the message. In the research report that Dove released simultaneously as their campaign launch, they explain the findings behind their message conceptualization by stating that “the concept of ‘beauty’ as it relates to an inherent physical trait seems to be obsolete.
Rather, women claim situations and experiences enable them to feel beautiful. In fact, 59% of women say that beauty ‘changes over time’ because beauty is connected to certain situations and life moments” (Antonucci, Gavenas, Reid, Steiner, & Wolf, 2004, p. 8). In this same way, ambiguity can be produced in the difficult challenge of defining what beauty is and what it can be. “Different persons, different women, dissimilarly define beauty in terms of its meaning, importance, and the role it plays in everyday life… audience negotiation of meaning from advertising is complex, especially since many contextual factors, as well as habits, assumptions, emotions, and cognitive schemata, influence interpretations” (Millard, 2011, p. 146). For Dove, it was key that they understood the threats and dangers of entering into such an influential market, especially in the way of social media before truly understand the impact that can hold when your consumers are now able to comment and communicate directly onto your marketing initiatives.

**IMC Strategy**

Before the creation of the campaign strategy, the Dove’s branding and marketing team sat around a table trying to communicate the clear results they had received from their global research study. “The team’s intuitive sense as human beings was that it made them feel a bit demoralized and a bit miserable. It makes you feel deflated when you see the gap between these images of perfection and your own physical reality” (Jeffers, 2005, pp. 2). The realization of the reality of the beauty industry and marketing brought both the agency and client to a messaging that had not yet been portrayed. The advertising strategic planner explains their IMC strategy by stating that “we wanted to democratize beauty and make more women feel more included in its definition rather than excluded… At its broadest, it hits all these women that actually have felt a degree of demoralizing or annoyed by the imagery around them. We’re talking to all women who
have had that sense of exasperation” (Jeffers, 2005, pp. 6). The two creative strategy approaches that the team moved forward with was broken down into, first, a general re-branding strategy for Dove and, second, a stand-out guerilla marketing campaign that would make society uncomfortable enough to notice the conversation that needed to be had.

**Challenges and Description of Market**

The challenges and placement within the market is understood through an analysis and evaluation of the market segmentation and brand positioning. Through assessing Dove’s IMC strategy and target segmentation, the market segment that most accurately describes the messaging is full market coverage. With full market coverage, Dove is focusing and reaching all groups of women with all of their products, not specifically highlighting a single product of target, but instead, emphasizing the message and branding (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Dove successfully executes this coverage through undifferentiated marketing, where strategically placed tactics can be seen by all women, in an attempt to change the perspective on beauty without focusing on segmentation differences. A challenge that comes naturally with undifferentiated marketing in the strategy of full market coverage is the possibility of “increasing splintering of the market and the proliferation of marketing channels and communication, which make it difficult and increasingly expensive to reach a mass audience” (Kotler & Keller, 2016, p. 264).

The brand positioning within the market for Dove during the launch of the Real Beauty campaign was also crucial to fueling the successful results. Identifying the frame of reference, the Dove brand is well-positioned within the category membership of beauty and body care products, even among their top competitors, including Olay, Nivea, and Clinique. The points-of-difference that Dove utilizes to stand out from their competition is the simplicity and diversity of
their products, especially with various, sensitive skin types. Another point of difference comes from the implementation of the campaign strategy, where Dove positions marketing that affirms and encourages the consumers, compared to the overwhelming negativity coming from beauty advertising. With these things in mind, the brand positioning statement for Dove is: to the middle-aged woman who seeks affordable, effective beauty and body care products, Dove is the positively authentic brand that allows consumers to feel confident in their own skin, making each buyer feel that they have made a confident, trustworthy decision that represents their stand against the destructive, negativity in beauty marketing.

**Target**

The integrated marketing target segmentation revolved solely around women. In general, the scope of the campaign targeted all ages, sizes, and ethnicities of women, as the wide target selection supported the heart of the message that Dove was trying to convey. When Dove conducted their initial global research, they sought the responses from women ages 18 to 65. Although this initial age gap could be considered as too large to effectively communicate toward, the impact of the campaign mostly came from middle-ages women, ages 35 to 55 (Morel, 2009). Made up of various ethnicities, this target consumer typically held a middle-class income where they were more lenient towards frequently purchasing low-end, drugstore beauty products and viewed high-end, luxury beauty products as too much of an investment. Relating to the offering of Dove products, the target market regularly uses makeup, specialty body soaps, and hair care products, highly valuing self-image and appearance within their circle of influence (2009). Most of the women that were impacted by this campaign were located in suburban and urban regions, compared to rural regions, and heavily from within the United States, even though strong waves of impact came through Europe as well.
After post-campaign research, Dove found that the majority of the women impacted were women who had families, typically made up of a husband and an average of three children (Baughn, 2019). With that being said, these women value and prioritize family life above the other areas of their lives. Most of the women that make up the impacted consumer are those that allot much time and effort taking care of themselves so that they can keep up with the rest of their families. As mentioned earlier, they focus on appearing put together and have a desire to be a thought leader among their friends on raising children, marriage, and wellness (Morel, 2009). With the constant pressure to maintain the ideal and perfect image, the Real Beauty campaign hit a level of intimacy and raw, authenticity with this target segment that few brands had reached before.

**Tactics**

The tactics of Dove’s Real Beauty campaign were released in strategically planned phases that grew the attention of the public and placed the Dove brand at the top of many consumers’ minds. “The initial phase of the campaign was built around a series of interactive outdoor billboard ads that invited those who viewed them to vote on whether the women on the billboards (not models, but a cross-section of average females) were ‘fat’ or ‘fab,’ ‘gray’ or ‘gorgeous,’ ‘wrinkled’ or ‘wonderful’” (“From beauty bar”, 2017, pp. 2). If these billboard designs were viewed through a digital presentation of display advertising, viewers could click on their opinion between the two options and a ‘real-time tally of the percentages’ were displayed on the outdoor billboard ads for drivers and those who passed the marketing tactic to see the impact of the campaign messaging (2017). The main target audience saw themselves on the billboard and were faced with their perspective on their own beauty. This initial campaign opening tactic hit huge success as over 1.5 million consumers visited the campaign website, and
not long after, Dove realized the reality of the conversation they had started (2017). As the campaign continued, Dove released another series of billboards that featured women of all different shapes, colors, and sizes in their underwear, openly describing the images as ‘real beauty’.

The second phase of tactics brought the campaigns’ first big breakthrough, and it came in the form of video ads and tv spots. A video commercial, ‘Evolution’, was the first and most impactful of all the following video content Dove produced. “‘Evolution’ featured a young woman whose appearance was dramatically transformed via makeup, hair styling, lighting effects, and digital manipulation… [it] was a powerful depiction of just how readily a woman’s outward appearance can be altered to conform to advertisers’ expectations” (“From beauty bar”, 2017, pp. 4). The tagline the was paired with this video called out the way that traditional advertising has distorted society’s perception of beauty. Another video ad that was released shortly after ‘Evolution’ was a commercial spot called ‘Onslaught’, creating almost as much of a public conversation as the first. ‘Onslaught’ “shows a young girl bombarded by media images seemingly designed to make her insecure about her looks… [and] encouraged parents to ‘talk to your daughters before the beauty industry does’” (2017, pp. 6). Both of these commercials and a handful after were a part of the some of the first television marketing stand outs that actually caused the viewers to stop and think about the content they were watching. To say the least, these tactics were shocking and called out the beauty industry right in front of their main consumers.

Phase three of the integrated marketing campaign was the release of digital initiatives that interacted with viewers and caused them to be a part of the change in beauty perception. Curating an ad makeover interactive campaign, Dove released Facebook-based advertisements
that gave women the ability to change negatively focused beauty messages to positive ones created and sponsored by Dove (Harris, 2015). The brand strategists behind this phase of the campaign decided to purchase and overbid on the most popular search terms that beauty advertisers use in their campaigns, replacing them with positive messages. “The statistics bear witness to its success: 171 million banners with negative messages were displaced and 5.5 million unique women reached. Over 50% of the women who visited Dove Ad Makeover created a message, and 82% of the ads seen were created by friends of the viewer” (Harris, 2015, pp. 16). Even with all of the data already pointing to the clear achievement, the best aspect was that over 71% of women reported to feeling more beautiful throughout the duration of this phase (2015).

The fourth phase of the integrated campaign was the aspect of cause marketing. Partnering with various non-profit organizations, such as Girl Scouts, Dove was able to promote self-esteem and their idea of real beauty through reaching and expanding their target consumer. “Women are more affected by cause marketing because they are more likely than men to make the connection between something that is good for the self and good for others. 63% of women said that taking care of others is a part of taking care of themselves” (Morel, 2009, p. 44).

Why Did They Succeed?

The success of the Real Beauty by Dove campaign is evident, and even when comparing how far they have come to where they stand as a brand now in 2020. Since the 1990s alone, Dove has grown from a $200 million brand to a worth of $4 billion (Harris, 2015). Starting back in 2004 when the campaign was first created, advertising was just starting to become more digital, social media had barely entered the marketing mix, and brands were still trying to fully understand their research and technological capabilities with the ever-changing trends. The real
success of Dove comes back to the heart of their original message, from focusing on building their brand voice, empowering women, and transforming the image of real beauty within the center of the industry.

**Biblical Lessons**

For a strong and successful integrated marketing campaign, the brand must present themselves in an honest and true way. 1 John 3:18 states “let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth” (NIV). In this way, consumers no longer trust what brands say or promote without seeing evidence from that brand that they live what they preach. True brand transparency and authenticity comes when consumers are able to see the real personality and honesty from that particular organization. There is also a reminder in Proverbs 11:3 that we are to be guided by integrity. Even when brands make mistakes or a marketing initiative does not go as planned, consumers would rather see the integrity of that brand own up to their mistakes through the process than see the brand cover up these choices.

The heart of the Dove integrated campaign holds such a strong biblical message. Dove ultimately communicated to their target consumer in similar ways that Jesus communicates to His followers. John 15:19 states that “if you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you” (ESV). In this way, Dove is telling women that they cannot trust and rely on what society tells them, because according to Dove, true beauty comes from within and is relative on the outside. Whereas for believers in Christ, Jesus is telling us to place our identity in Him and not in the world, because the world and the brokenness of the world despises those who love and follow the Lord. As a takeaway for pursuing a future career in marketing and advertising, the most important aspect to reaching a specific target is to give them back a part of
their needs and identity that has been taken away. This will create strong brand loyalty and effective relationship marketing.

**Conclusion**

Understanding the analysis of a full integrated marketing campaign gives researchers and other marketers a basis of knowledge on the importance of research and strong initiatives. Dove is known for their efforts within their Real Beauty, and there is much to take away from understanding their reasoning behind such a strong movement apart from advertising their products alone. After observing the SWOT analysis, integrated strategy, and tactics of such an innovative and risk-taking brand, the best understandings and lessons learned come from knowing the heart behind the message. Real Beauty was birthed from the idea of a lack of truly understanding beauty and “Dove was concerned that this limited portrayal of beauty was preventing women from recognizing and enjoying beauty in themselves and others… this situation could also impact women’s well-being, happiness and self-esteem” (Etcoff, Orbach, Scott, & D’Agostino, 2004, p. 2). True success comes from stepping out of the box and taking advantage of new and upcoming trends, and this is the exact example we receive from Dove.
References


